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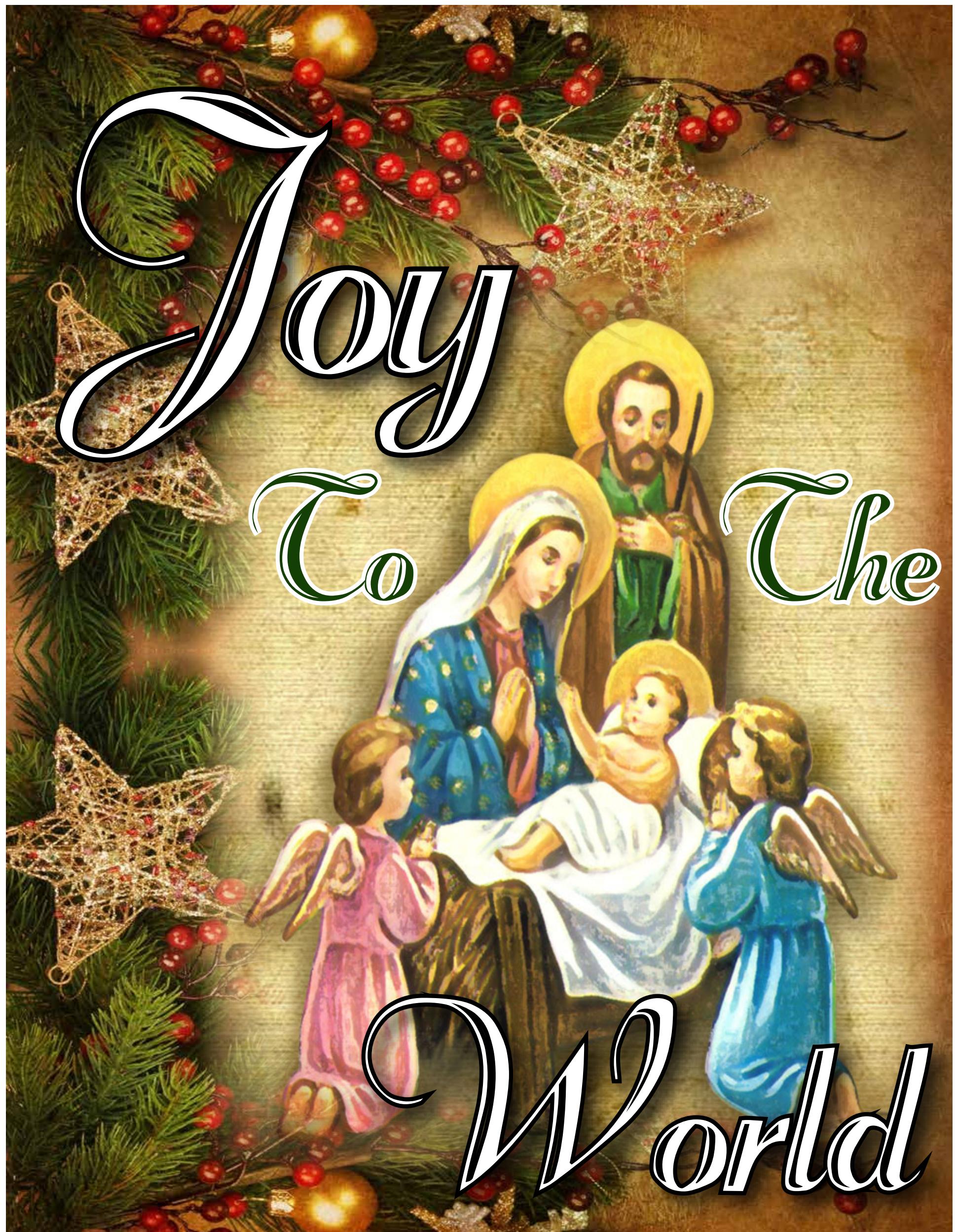
# PRESS



December 25, 2025

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Vol. 53, No. 25



## New in the Bangor Public Library

### Adult Fiction:

Turns of Fate by Anne Bishop; Spasm: A Novel by Robin Cook; I, Medusa: A Novel by Ayana Gray; The Perfect Hosts: A Novel by Heather Gudenkauf; Snake-eater by T. Kingfisher; Violet Thistlewaite is not a Villain Anymore by Emily Krempholtz; My Blade, Your Back by K.M. Moronova; The Botanists' Assistant by Peggy Townsend

### Adult Non Fiction:

The Rembrandt Heist: The Story of a Criminal Genius, A Stolen Masterpiece, And An Enigmatic Friendship by Anthony M. Amore; The Gales of November: The Untold Story of the Edmund Fitzgerald by John U. Bacon; Good Things: Recipes and Rituals to Share With People You Love by Samin Nosrat; The Shortest History of AI: The Six Essential Ideas that Animate It by Toby Walsh

### Large Print Adult Fiction:

Gone Before Goodbye: A Novel by Reese Witherspoon

### Easy Fiction:

Bluey: Barky Boats; My Dad is Awesome; 5-Minute Classic Stories; Class Trip by Neville Astley; 5-Minute Princess Stories by Jo Ellen Bogart; Carina Felina by Carmen Agra Deedy; You're My Little Christmas Cookie by Nicola Edwards; The Littlest Yak and the New Arrival by Lu Fraser; Let it Go by Robert Lopez; Don't Call Me Grumpycorn by Sarah McIntyre; You Are Loved: A Book About Families by Margaret O'Hair; A Frozen Christmas by Andrea Posner-Sanchez; Dr. Seuss's Lovey Things by Dr. Seuss; Elvis & Romeo by David Soman; Ladybug Girl and her Mama by David Soman; Home: A Peek-through Picture Book by Britta Teckentrup

### Easy Non Fiction:

Yoga Frog by Nora Shalaway Carpenter; Let's Talk About Body Boundaries by Julia Emote; Baking by Jill McDonald

### Easy Reader Fiction:

Parker Dresses Up by Parker Curry

### Junior Fiction:

Growing Home by Beth Ferry

### Junior Non Fiction:

The Complete Cookbook for Young Chefs; How to Draw Everything: Cute Stuff, Animals, Food, Gifts, and Other Amazing Things by Emma Greene; How to Draw Anything: 300 Drawings of Adorable Things, Animals, Food, Gifts, and Other Amazing Items by Emma Greene; There are No Silly Questions by Mike Ramp顿

### Young Adult Fiction:

Spy X Family 15 by Tatsuya Endo; A Forgery of Fate by Elizabeth Lim

### DVDs:

The Gilded Age: The Complete Third Season; The Handmaid's Tale: Season Six; The Naked Gun

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# The PRESS

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## Local Man Debuts New Album



John Pachnos, second from right, is joined by Frankie Occhiogrosso, Carter Vames, Caleb Heinze, and Justin Vedovelli at the release of Pachnos' self-titled album of original jazz compositions.

The Fountain House in Fredon, NJ, was the setting for the launch of a new album of original jazz compositions by North Warren alumnus, John Pachnos. With Pachnos on bass, the 5-member ensemble performed seven tunes from the album before a packed and enthusiastic crowd. Performing with Pachnos were guitarist Caleb Heinze, keyboardist Frankie Occhiogrosso (Midnight), saxophonist Carter Vames, and percussionist Justin Vedovelli. All band members met during their time as students at the Mason Gross School of Music at Rutgers University, and they continue to perform periodically throughout the area.

The self-titled album consists of original jazz pieces composed during the pandemic while

Pachnos was a student at Rutgers. "I wrote most of these charts in various stages of my studies at Mason Gross School of the Arts. Many of them were me channeling my feelings about a certain time in my life into music, be it a celebration of my heritage or just lamenting the change in seasons," Pachnos explained. "Obviously, I really enjoyed performing all my tunes, but what resonated with me the most was seeing people from all different parts of my life—people from my school, my church, my family, among other things—all coming together to see me at this event. They were all speaking with each other and getting to know each other."

While the album is currently available in CD format only, Pachnos is in the process of working with a publicist to release the album on streaming platforms.

The album launch event was such a hit that Fountain House owners Doreen Rutherford and Nelson Albert are considering adding regularly scheduled jazz performances to their rotation of musical offerings.



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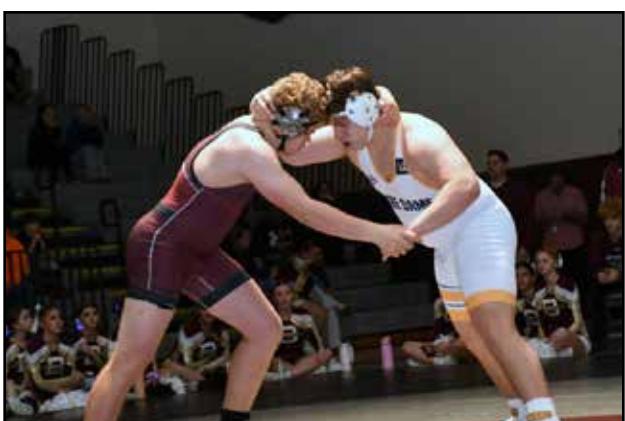
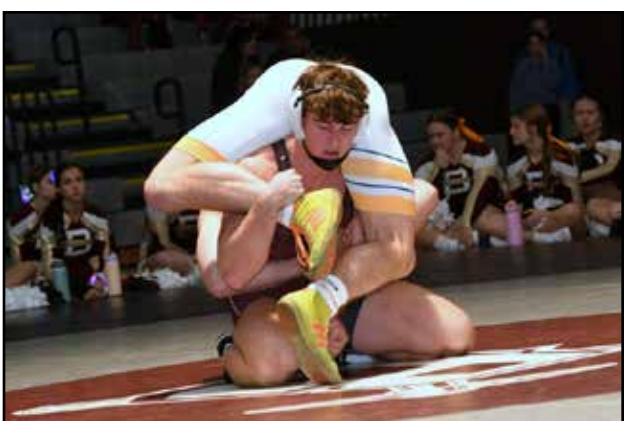
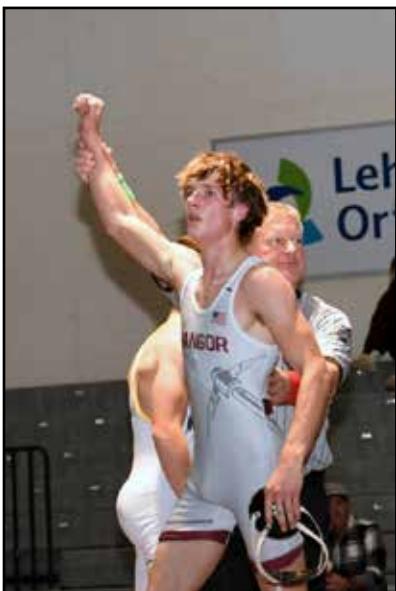
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## PEN ARGYL (39) VS SOUTHERN LEHIGH (34) WRESTLING YOUTH NIGHT



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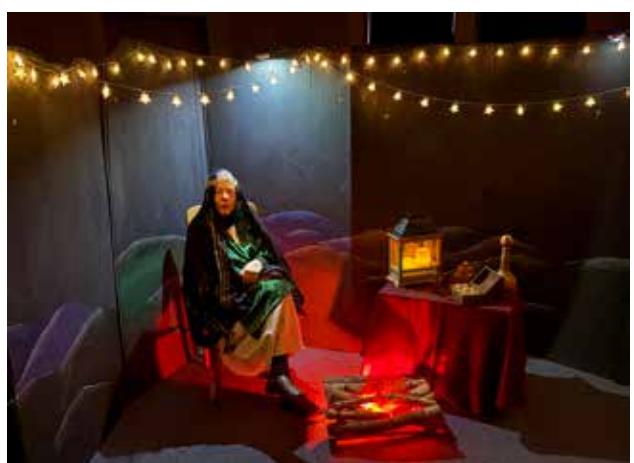
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## East Bangor United Methodist Church Presents: "One Starry Night"



East Bangor UMC Church presented "One Starry Night" on December 13 & 14. Those who visited were truly inspired as they followed "The Star" traveling through Bethlehem and finding Jesus in the manger.



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## Rep. Flood Announces Grant Funding for Police, Fire and Infrastructure Upgrades in Northampton County, PA

Rep. Ann Flood (R-Northampton) is thrilled to announce more than \$920,000 in Local Share Account (LSA) grants have been awarded to municipalities in Northampton County to improve public safety and infrastructure.

"These grants represent a significant investment in the safety and well-being of our communities," Flood said. "By upgrading critical equipment and infrastructure, we're ensuring first responders have the tools they need and residents benefit from improved services."

### Grants Awarded:

Bushkill Township Police Department: \$150,000

Funding will be used to purchase 22 P25-compliant portable radios to improve interoperability and emergency response.

Bushkill Township Volunteer Fire Company: \$150,000

The grant will support the purchase of 15 mo-



bile and 35 portable P25 radios for enhanced communication with local and state agencies.

East Bangor Borough: \$86,000

Funds will be used to install high-resolution surveillance cameras at critical infrastructure sites to improve security.

Forks Township: \$275,000

The township will acquire a sewer camera truck to prevent pipe deterioration and sinkhole issues.

Lower Mount Bethel Township: \$135,000

The grant will help purchase a John Deere utility tractor with a Tiger Boom Mower to improve road

safety and reduce maintenance costs.

Moore Township: \$124,000

Funding will be used to replace aging police vehicles with a Ford Police Interceptor Utility and a Ford Expedition 4x4.

The Local Share Account program is funded by gaming revenues under Pennsylvania's Race Horse Development and Gaming Act and administered by the Commonwealth Financing Authority. It supports projects that improve the quality of life for residents, including public safety, infrastructure, and community development initiatives.

## Sober Living Residences Would Face Licensing Requirements Under New Bill

The Assembly Appropriations Committee on Thursday advanced a bill that would require the state Department of Human Services to license and regulate sober living homes.

Sober living homes offer voluntary transitional housing for individuals who have completed drug or alcohol rehabilitation programs who are not yet ready to live independently. Such residences are privately owned and may obtain voluntary certification through programs like Garden State Alliance of Recovery Residences, which follows the standards of the national organization. Owners must obtain a class F license from the state Department of Community Affairs to operate a cooperative sober living residence.

However, they differ from traditional halfway houses, residences already regulated by the DHS, in that they

lack structured and supervised counseling or training services, and licensed staff, but instead rely on peer accountability for maintaining sobriety. A 2024 report from the State Commission of Investigation found that without reforms, such arrangements are ripe for fraud and exploitation.

"Sober living residences are an important step on the road to recovery for people who have completed rehab but aren't quite ready to go out on their own," said bill sponsor Assemblyman Michael Inganamort (R-Morris, Sussex, Warren). "The legislation aims to protect those residents from bad actors who want to take advantage of the lack of regulation to bilk patients and insurance companies, while also reinforcing the role of municipalities in the approval process."

If passed, the bill (A2198) would require that municipal govern-

ments approve homes used as sober living residences within 500 feet of a school. Facility administrators and anyone handling government benefits must pass a criminal background check.

In addition, residents' rights would expand under the legislation, requiring facilities to provide notice of eviction, the exception being residents posing an immediate threat to others in the house. The bill would create a residential registry, updated daily, with vacancies and other pertinent information listed.

The Garden State Alliance of Recovery Residences reports there are more than 50 certified homes throughout New Jersey.

Inganamort's bill, which is part of his Small Town Rescue Plan released last year, already received approval in the Assembly Oversight Committee back in May 2024.

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## NORTH WARREN (44) VS DOVER (41) BOYS BASKETBALL



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The Free Weekly Press



### Committee Approves Public Vote on Constitutional Amendment Extending Civil Service Hiring Preference to More Veterans

The Assembly Military and Veteran Affairs Committee advanced a bipartisan proposal by Assemblywoman Dawn Fantasia that would allow voters in New Jersey to decide whether the Legislature should pass a law eliminating the wartime service requirement for veterans to receive hiring preferences for civil service positions.

"All New Jersey veterans deserve better access to civilian career opportunities, regardless of where or when they served. This is the first step in furthering New Jersey's support of all veterans," Fantasia (R-Sussex, Morris, Warren) said. "Allowing voters to decide whether to broaden the civil service hiring preference is a

must, not only because the change would amend the New Jersey Constitution, but also because it gives current veterans and their families an opportunity to weigh in on an issue that directly affects them."

Article Seven 7 of the state constitution provides that veterans with active service in any branch of the military in a time of

war qualify for hiring preference in the civil service. Once approved, Fantasia's resolution (ACR98) requires that a question on eliminating the wartime requirement be submitted to voters during a general election. If voters approve it, the Legislature would then pass a law extending the civil service hiring preference.

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## Influenza Suspected In Recent Snow Goose Mortalities

Avian influenza is suspected to have caused the deaths of hundreds of snow geese found at a Northampton County quarry.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is coordinating a response to this incident that includes safe removal, testing and disposal of these birds.

Those encountering other sick or dead wild birds anywhere in Pennsylvania can report them to the Game Commission by calling 1-833-PGC-WILD (1-833-742-9453). Any sick or dead domestic birds should be reported to Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture at 717-772-2852. If you have had contact with sick or dead birds and are not feeling well, contact your primary care physician or the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 877-PA-HEALTH (877-724-3258).

The U.S. outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) began in January 2022 and has impacted wild and domestic birds in every state. In Pennsylvania, there was a sharp resurgence of HPAI cases in wild birds in late 2024 and early 2025. Impacts tailed off after several weeks, though the virus continued to be detected at lower levels.

Wild waterfowl and shorebirds are considered natural carriers for avian influenza viruses and might shed the virus in their feces and saliva despite appearing healthy. HPAI also can



lead to sickness or death in raptors (hawks, eagles), avian scavengers (crows, gulls, ravens) and wild poultry (turkey, grouse).

The virus typically does not affect bird species that frequent backyard bird feeders. Exercise good hygiene when maintaining bird feeders and baths, emptying them every couple of weeks and disinfecting them with a 10% household bleach solution. If you notice multiple sick or dead birds over a short period of time, strongly consider leaving feeders down and baths empty to not make any potential outbreak worse.

Clinical signs of infection in wild birds are often non-specific, but might include neurologic dysfunction such as circling, head tilting, and difficulty flying.

HPAI can potentially infect humans, though the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has declared that the current HPAI outbreak

is primarily an animal health issue that poses low risk to the health of the general public.

People can help safeguard themselves against HPAI by always viewing wildlife from a safe distance, avoiding contact with wild birds or their feces and not handling wildlife unless you're hunting, trapping or otherwise authorized to do so.

Waterfowl hunters are encouraged to continue participating in the remaining season, but should take precautions while handling and dressing birds. These include wearing gloves, protective eye wear and a mask. Following any hunt, make a point to practice good hygiene, including washing hands and any clothing or equipment used in dressing game that may contain blood or feces. Cook all wild bird meat to 160 degrees Fahrenheit.

Dogs encountering HPAI also are at risk of infection. Dog owners should keep their dogs up to date on vaccinations and preventive medications, prevent their dogs from coming in contact with wild birds or their feces, and should not allow dogs to consume environmental water.

More information about avian influenza is available at [www.pa.gov/pgc](http://www.pa.gov/pgc).



At around 03:04am on December 18th, the Frelinghuysen Township Volunteer Fire Company responded to a structure fire. The crew began to extinguish the fire with the assistance of Allamuchy Fire Dept., Green Township Fire Department, and Blairstown Hose Company #1. A special thanks to the Green Township Fire Chief. We are incredibly grateful to have men and women answering the call, especially at that late hour. We are glad to report that there were no injuries or loss of structure. Courtesy Frelinghuysen Volunteer Fire Company



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## Garden Dilemmas? Ask Mary!



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Hello fellow readers,

Recent rains washed away the late-fall snow that had so festively decorated our world. It felt curious to have snow arrive ahead of schedule, but everything has its season — and sometimes, seasons come early. Nature never apologizes for timing. She simply unfolds. And in that unfolding, I've learned, lies one of our greatest teachers.

Thank you to those of you who reached back after last week's column. Your messages warmed my heart. A few of you mentioned that you hadn't noticed the Mr. Beach analogy at first, and that made me smile. (The story title The Garden

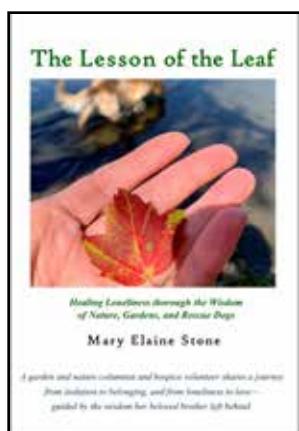
Teaches Letting Go is archived on AskMaryStone.com.) There are so many parallels between our lives and what lives in nature — if we slow down enough to notice.

As I shared last week's reflections, I didn't realize they might become the epilogue of my book, The Lesson of the Leaf. Recently, I had another opportunity to submit a revised book proposal to Hay House Publishing. Wherever this book finds its home, I feel deeply called to bring it into the world.

And truthfully, it doesn't feel like my book alone. It feels like our book. So much of it has grown from our weekly conversations — from what we've noticed together in the garden of life.

One chapter in Part Two is titled Still Water, Clear Seeing. It explores how stillness becomes a doorway to clarity — through quiet rivers, winter woods, resting gardens, and moments when nothing appears to be happening at all.

There's an image from the Tao Te Ching, written more than 2,500 years ago, that speaks of muddy water. If left



alone, the sediment settles, and the water clears — not because we stirred it, not because we fixed it, but because we waited.

Nature understands this instinctively. Streams settle when undisturbed. Gardens rest beneath the snow. Birds negotiate shared space without meetings or manuals. Healing and



growth follow the same patterns — though in modern life, when something feels uncomfortable, we're quick to fix it, rush it, or "get over it."

Stillness asks something different of us. Stillness is not giving up. It is not falling behind. It is not stagnation. It is an active state of listening.

When we listen to silence, we begin to notice subtle shifts — the way light moves across water, the moment a bird lands nearby, the quiet knowing that arrives without explanation. Healing and growth do not need to be fast or dramatic to be real.

We are not broken because we need time. We are not late because we don't yet have answers.

Another chapter, The Grace of Letting Go, explores the idea

that letting go is not an act of loss, but an act of trust. Through falling leaves and early acorn drops, it reflects on how release allows life to continue in new forms.

I think of the time while walking with my mother around the parking lot of a nursing home. Acorns were falling from a large oak tree. She was in an advanced stage of dementia, rarely speaking clearly. I filled the air talking about how those acorns would become trees, and how life does not truly end. Trying to assure her it was okay to let go, she said — clear as a bell — "I don't understand."

And in that moment, I learned how confusion can be held tenderly, without answers.

I'll close with a recent observation. While cross-country skiing around the yard,

I wandered down to the brook where clear ice crystals dangled beneath the rocks. I looked up and saw Ellie's memorial tree. The star topper caught the sun just right, blazing with light.

The phone couldn't capture it. And I smiled, thinking of my brother Bill, who gave me the lesson of the leaf. One lyric from his song "Hope Road," which he debuted 3 days before passing away, says, "Put down your phone and follow Hope Road."

So that is my wish for you this season and always — to trust nature's pace, to notice the light, and to allow growth to unfold, like a leaf in water. Wishing you and your family many blessings. Merry Christmas. Garden Dilemmas? AskMaryStone.com and your favorite Podcast App.

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## December 31 Deadline for Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program



The deadline for older Pennsylvanians and those with disabilities to apply for rebates on rent and property taxes paid in 2024 is fast approaching on December 31st.

The Pennsylvania Property Tax or Rent Rebate Program, also known as Form PA-1000, offers financial relief to eligible residents through rebates on property taxes or rent paid in the previous year. This PA tax rebate is funded by the Pennsylvania Lottery and is designed to support income-eligible seniors and individuals with disabilities.

You may qualify for the property tax rebate PA or renters rebate PA if you meet the following criteria:

Age: 65 or older  
Widows/widowers: Age 50 or older  
Individuals with disabilities: Age 18 or older

Income: Total household income must be \$48,110 or less, with half of Social Security income excluded

Spouses, personal representatives, or estates may also file on behalf of a deceased claimant who lived at least one day in the claim year and met all other eligibility requirements.

My staff is happy to help you apply before the end of the year. You can come into either of my office locations to apply in person or apply online at [mypad.pa.gov](http://mypad.pa.gov).

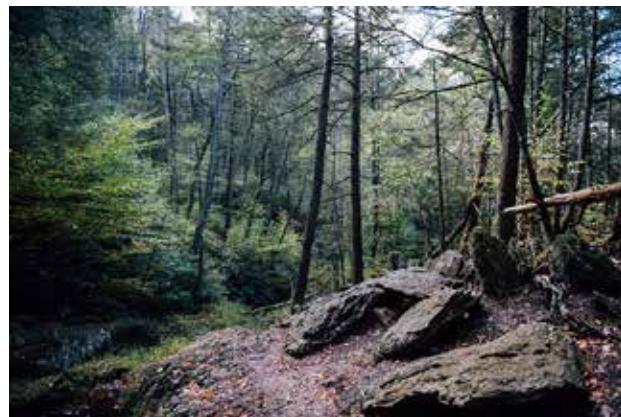
## Kean, Fantasia Bill that Protects Woodlands Clears Committee

The Assembly Appropriations Committee on Thursday approved a bill that will protect privately owned woodlands from creeping over-development.

The bill (S699/A682), sponsored by Assembly members Sean Kean and Dawn Fantasia and supported by various state environmental groups, will establish a woodlands protection fund to acquire development easements on privately-owned woodlands.

That fund, operated by the state Department of Environmental Protection, would use federal money, private donations and appropriations from the state Legislature to purchase easements. To qualify, woodlands must be at least five contiguous acres in size and be managed by the landowner according to state statute. Landowners would not be required to open those woodlands to the public.

"This bill does two things: it protects these natural spaces and respects property owners' rights," Kean (R-Monmouth) said. "With owners facing pressure to sell and



build, the state needs to proactively preserve these areas to safeguard these ecosystems and protect private owners from those pressures."

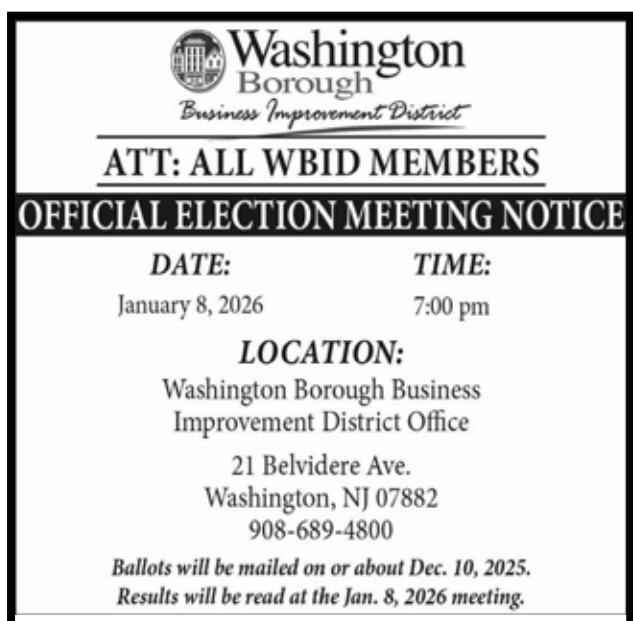
About 950,000 acres of forest are privately owned, with 40% of

that owned by people ages 65 and older. The state, local municipalities and counties, and federal government own the other 1.037 million forested acres.

Preserving forested land helps protect native

species, air quality and vital watersheds and other waterways. Economically, woodlands generate billions annually through tourism and forestry.

"This is personal for me. I live where I live because of the open space, the trees, and the rural landscape. When I'm not working, I'm outdoors, and I can't imagine northwest New Jersey without those things," said Fantasia (R-Sussex, Morris, Warren). "I want to protect our great outdoors from over-development so that future generations can experience the beauty our state has to offer."



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## Flood Announces Funding to Enhance Wind Gap Park



Rep. Ann Flood (R-Northampton) is honored to announce that Wind Gap Borough has been awarded a \$130,000 grant through the Commonwealth Financing Authority's Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program to support the development of the Wind Gap Park Pavilion in Northampton County.

"This grant will help create a welcoming space at Wind Gap Park that families, seniors and youth can enjoy for outdoor activities, community events and everyday recreation," said Flood. "I am proud to secure resources that improve quality of life, promote

outdoor recreation and support vibrant, healthy communities."

The Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, funds projects that plan, develop, rehabilitate and improve parks, recreation areas, greenways, trails and river conservation efforts across Pennsylvania.

The funding will enhance recreational opportunities and strengthen local infrastructure, supporting a community space where residents can gather, celebrate and enjoy the natural beauty of the area.

## Record Number of Area Schools Collected Toys in Friendly Competition - Stuff the Stocking Benefited the Season of Hope Toy Drive

Students from a record-breaking 51 schools in Sussex and Northern Warren Counties spent the last few weeks of 2025 collecting more than 9,000 new, unwrapped toys in a friendly Stuff the Stocking competition to benefit Project Self-Sufficiency's Season of Hope Toy Drive.

Each year, the winning school takes home the coveted Stuff the Stocking trophy, along with a monetary donation to their school's activity fund. Second and third place winners also receive monetary donations for their schools. This year, organizers have also awarded a trophy to the school which collected the most toys for the contest in Warren County.

Overall, Reverend George A. Brown Memorial School was the victor in the 2025 contest, with more than 1,800 toys collected followed by Pope John Middle School and Ogdensburg Elementary. North Warren placed fifth in the overall contest but took home the newly minted Warren County Stuff the Stocking trophy. Great Meadows Middle School and the Washington School District



placed second and third, respectively, in the Warren County contest.

Project Self-Sufficiency's Season of Hope Toy Drive gathers new, unwrapped toys and gift cards for Sussex and Northern Warren County children and teens. In 2025, more than 2,300 children and teens received new gifts from the Season of Hope Toy Shop.

"The holidays can be a challenging time for many families in our area, and many are experiencing unprecedented economic stress," commented Deborah Berry-Toon, Executive Director of Project Self-Sufficiency. "The overwhelming response by these students demonstrates to the families served by Season of Hope Toy Shop that the community cares about them. Having children select toys for other children is a special way to celebrate the true meaning of the holiday sea-

son. Whether a school gathered less than 50 toys or more than 500, we are grateful to each student and school which participated and helped to make the 2025 effort the most successful Stuff the Stocking contest to date."

Additional Sussex County schools which participated in the Stuff the Stocking contest included Alpine Montessori, Byram Intermediate, Cedar Mountain, Florence Burd, Franklin Borough, Glen Meadows Middle School, Green Hills, Halsted Middle School, Hardyston Middle School, High Point Regional High School, Kiddie Academy, Kittatinny High School, Lafayette Elementary School, Lenape Valley Regional High School, Long Pond, Lounsbury Hollow, McKeown Elementary, Montague Elementary, Newton High School, Pope John High School, Rolling Hills, Sandys-

ton-Walpack, Sparta Middle School, Stillwater Elementary School, Sussex Christian School, Sussex Middle School, Sussex Technical School, Valley Road, Walnut Ridge Primary School, and Wantage Elementary School

Warren County contestants also included Allamuchy Township School, Blair Academy, Central Elementary, Frelinghuysen Elementary School, Hackettstown High School, Hope Township Elementary School, Knowlton Elementary, Mountain Villa, Pohatcong, Warren County Technical School, Warren Hills Regional High School, and Warren Hills Regional Middle School.

Information about the Season of Hope Toy Drive and the programs and services available at Project Self-Sufficiency are available at [www.projectselfsufficiency.org](http://www.projectselfsufficiency.org) or by calling 973-940-3500.



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## Leadbeter Introduces Aiden's Law, Urges Continued Support



As efforts continue to protect the Commonwealth's most vulnerable citizens, state Rep. Robert Leadbeter (R-Columbia) was joined by family members of Aiden Ha, legislators and advocates for a press conference today to announce the formal introduction of House Bill 2102 –known as Aiden's Law – and urge continued support.

This initiative, which he is championing, is named after Aiden Ha, a 6-year-old nonverbal and autistic child from Columbia County who was tragically found dead in a river in October.

Leadbeter's legislation would create a Purple Alert system in Pennsylvania. Similar to Amber Alert for abducted children, Silver Alert for missing older adults and Green Alert for missing at-risk veterans, the Purple Alert system would rapidly notify the public and law enforcement when an individual with certain cognitive, intellectual or developmental disabilities goes missing.

"Aiden's heartbreaking passing shattered our communities," said Leadbeter. "As a father, every parent's worst nightmare is losing their child. As a brother of a police officer, I know firsthand how law enforcement is the last line of defense to protect those who are unable to do so themselves. This effort has bipartisan support. We must act with urgency and enact this into law so tragedies like these can be prevented from happening again."

According to Leadbeter, Pennsylvania would join Florida, Maryland, Kansas, Mississippi, Connecticut and West Virginia if this program were to become implemented into law.

To watch Leadbeter's remarks, click the link below: <https://pagopvideo.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/868364618.mp4>

To view the entire press conference, click the link below: <https://pagopvideo.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/572127345.mp4>

## Clean Team Workforce Proudly Announces December Employee of the Month

The Clean Team Workforce congratulates its Employee of the Month for December, Tracy S.

Tracy lived with his mother and father his entire life. In 1992, Tracy's father passed away. He and his mother continued living in the familial home, and he continued working until 2002, when Tracy's mom became ill. He then left his job to dedicate himself to her care.

Tracy's mom passed in 2010, and he fell into a state of depression. He couldn't work, so he lived off his savings and inheritance until all his financial resources were exhausted and the house became uninhabitable.

Feeling like life became too much to handle, Tracy attempted to end his life. Fortunately, his neighbor called 911, and his life was saved. Without a house to go back to, he came to the Allentown Rescue Mission after being released from a psychiatric facility.

Tracy stayed in the Emergency Shelter for a few weeks in June of this year and then enrolled in the Mission's Transformation Program to learn more about God and to



learn skills to help him manage his life.

While in the Transformation Program, Tracy volunteered his free time to help organize the Mission's pantry and receive food and clothing donations. Once he graduated from the program, he began working for the Clean Team Workforce.

Tracy started as a street cleaner but has turned into a reliable worker for more skilled jobs. He worked closely with the Mission's Food Services Manager during its annual Food and Supplies drive to ensure donated items were properly

stored. Most recently, he became a driver for the Clean Team Workforce.

He transports work crews to jobsites and makes grocery runs for the Mission's kitchen.

Although Tracy isn't sure what direction he plans to go in the future, he does know it will be a positive direction. His current plan is to work for the Clean Team Workforce and save as much money as possible to help him get reestablished in the community.

When asked about his future, Tracy said, "I'm happy to be alive. I have hope again!"

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## DiMaio Bill Aims to Cut Taxpayer Costs by Cracking Down on Students Enrolling Under Fake Addresses

As property taxes reach record highs and affordability issues squeeze families, Assembly Republican Leader John DiMaio is introducing legislation that will potentially lower the largest portion of the bill – school taxes. His bill will allow school districts and municipalities to more easily identify students who enroll using false addresses, a problem referred to as “boundary hopping” that is unfairly increasing costs on local property taxpayers.

“It costs taxpayers an average of \$28,500 just to educate one student in a Warren County public school district. Even if

there are only a handful of students attending a school in a district where their parents don’t live or pay taxes, those costs quickly add up. That burden then gets unfairly placed on the local school taxpayer,” DiMaio (R-Warren) said.

In New Jersey, the average property-tax bill hit a record \$10,095 last year with about half of that going directly to fund schools. In some towns, school taxes can make up as much as 80% of the property tax bill. In total, residents paid more than \$18 billion in school taxes last year, a \$500 million increase from the year before.

DiMaio’s bill (A6265)

requires school districts to enter into a shared services agreement with municipalities where students of the district reside so that they can verify home addresses. The district would annually prepare a report that lists the addresses of every student enrolled and the municipality would then review that report to verify residency. If an address can’t be verified, districts are notified.

“Boundary hopping carries consequences beyond just costs,” DiMaio explained. “It also takes resources away from students and leads to overcrowding. This is especially problematic today when non-urban

districts are being forced to increase classroom sizes, close schools and cut programs because of drastic year-after-year state funding cuts.”

An Asbury Park Press story on boundary hopping in 2015 reported that some districts hired private investigators to help verify addresses and recoup tuition dollars from families illegally sending their kids to out-of-district schools. One source called the problem “extremely common” and estimated a minimum of half of 1% of all students are out of district. If the same stat holds true today, nearly 7,000 students are attending the wrong



school.

Under current law, a parent or guardian must primarily reside within the district’s boundaries for the child to attend the district’s school. If a family moves, the student no longer has the right to attend school in that district. However, New Jersey also offers an Interdistrict Public School Choice Program that enables approved districts to enroll K-12th grade students who do not reside within their districts without cost to their parents. Families have to apply to their school of choice. There are 119 choice districts in

New Jersey for the next school year.

“There is a process parents must follow if they need to send their child to a different district that ensures costs are covered and opportunities are available. Falsifying records to send a child to a different school because it’s more convenient, a better performing district, or has a good sports program, is harmful to students who actually live in the district and the local taxpayers bearing the burden,” DiMaio said. “This bill makes it easier for school districts to get the problem under control and rein in costs.”

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